



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Maureen T. Carney

Vice-Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge

Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor James Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 23, 2018, 4 p.m.

Location: City Council Chambers

212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

Present: Councilor Maureen T. Carney, Chair
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge, Vice Chair
Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell
Councilor James Nash

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 4 p.m., Councilor Carney called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilors Bidwell, Carney, LaBarge and Nash were present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Patricia Shaughnessy of 182 Chestnut Street pointed out that the city is losing two wonderful employees – Heather Cahillane and Victoria Hunt - and five extraordinary board members, all over the appointment of the new director. It is unfortunate that the Council on Aging chair did not speak to other board members or seniors, because, if he had, she did not think this would be happening. It is an unfortunate situation for the community because it is a great senior center with great staff and a lot of terrific seniors. A number of employees and Council on Aging board members are gone, and that is a tremendous loss, she observed.

Susan Maguire of 46 Avis Circle commented that many people think that the Bistro will reopen as soon as the new director is on board. Although the job description for the COA director has a special requirement that the candidate be Servsafe-certified, the person being appointed does not have that certification. Therefore, the Bistro will not be reopening soon. Heather has that certification and is CPR and allergen-certified. Under Heather's leadership, she was the volunteer that managed the cooks from the jail. She was asked to do this because of her experience working with probationers and offenders. Heather, the other volunteers and the men from the jail formed a great team, and the Bistro was running well and operating in the black. She asked members not to refer the present candidate for appointment as Senior Center Director to the full city council since she does not have the Servsafe certification required by the job description.

Harry Petrucci of 182 Chestnut Street reminded councilors that they have an obligation to their constituents and that these include the senior community. He thinks they are doing an injustice to them if they perpetrate the appointment the Mayor proposes. If they are just going to act as a rubber stamp to the Mayor, they should start thinking about their positions as city councilors, he suggested. If the Mayor is doing an injustice to the population of Northampton, the city council should be righting it, he asserted. Why bother having a stipended city council if all it's going to do is rubber stamp whatever the Mayor wants? He asked rhetorically. He would hope they would stand up and do what's right for their constituents and the people of Northampton, he concluded.

Marlene Marrocco of 46 Avis Circle started by saying that she feels really bad for all of them: Northampton seniors, volunteers, staff, senior center members and the Northampton community.

"I feel bad for the Mayor," she added, noting that she'd like to think he made a decision based on what he thought was best for Northampton seniors. But the situation isn't about the Mayor, the chosen candidate, the articles, phone calls, letters to the editor, or people at today's meeting, she maintained; it is about the opportunity for the City Services Committee to demonstrate that they are listening and to change their minds based on their constituents' voices. It is about showing the Northampton community that they matter and being willing to act on the many feelings, voices and opinions they've heard. A vote not to refer the Mayor's candidate to the city council will speak volumes, proving to Northampton residents that they do listen and that they are willing to correct an oversight. She implored them to listen to the voices of the seniors and vote down the appointment.

"Let's take the time to re-examine what's best for the community from those who know it best," i.e. the seniors, staff, volunteers and members of the Northampton Senior Center, she urged.

Erin Wolcott of 54 North Maple Street reminded committee members that they are elected representatives and that they work for the residents of Northampton, not the Mayor, who she claimed 'is making a wrong choice.' The seniors want Heather Cahillane, someone who is qualified and has added programs; who knows them and can take the position with a running start. The new person is going to take at least six months to a year to learn the job and, in the meantime, they are going to have turmoil. Seniors are one of the largest blocks of votes and go to the polls for every election. They need to listen and overturn, not nominate and approve, she insisted.

Additional public comments were received from **Jane Bickford of 96 Dunphy Drive, Bill Lent of 74 State Street, David Corbett of 39 Fort Hill Terrace and Karen Faszczka of 11 Diamond Court.**

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion of Appointment Process (Charter Section 2-10)

At the suggestion of the chair, Councilor LaBarge moved to take agenda item #5 (**5. New Business, A. Discussion of Appointment Process (Charter Section 2-10)**) out of order. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

Councilor Carney read the text of **Charter Section 2-10, City Council Confirmation of Certain Appointments**, which outlines the process for appointment of department heads and members of multi-member boards. Within the last four years, the review of appointments has been the purview

of the City Services Committee, she said. The committee has the option of forwarding the appointment with either a positive, negative or neutral recommendation.

Councilor Bidwell expressed his understanding that the committee's role is very clear. The council as a whole can approve or reject appointments but the committee can only make a recommendation, he noted.

Councilor LaBarge said she would like to recognize the Mayor to discuss the appointment process. Mayor Narkewicz said he intended to do this when he introduced the candidate but would be happy to do so now if councilors prefer. Councilor LaBarge moved to take item #4 out of order. Councilor Bidwell seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

4. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. 18.081 Appointment of Marie Westburg as Director of Senior Services - referred by City Council 4/5/2018

Regarding the appointment process, Mayor Narkewicz referenced Charter Sections 2-10 and 3-3, Appointments by the Mayor. The process followed was the same process used for appointment of all other department heads, including former Senior Services Director Linda Desmond, he advised. The position was advertised in local newspapers and on line and sent out to the Massachusetts Council on Aging and an extensive e-mail distribution list. Although it is his appointment, he formed a screening committee to advise him on the initial screening of applicants. The city received 30 applications. The composition of the screening committee followed the same model used for other appointments; i.e. – a representative of the Human Resources Department (Sue Stone), two members of the Council on Aging (Chair Robert Montague and Kathy Pekala-Service), as a subject matter expert, a sitting senior center director from another community (South Hadley COA Director Leslie Hennessey) and a City Councilor (Councilor Dwight).

The screening committee went through the applications and conducted preliminary interviews and forwarded their recommendations for qualified candidates to the Mayor. He, in turn, conducted his own process and selected the candidate now before the City Council.

Councilor Nash expressed his understanding that four candidates were forwarded to the Mayor for his consideration, and Mayor Narkewicz confirmed that is correct. He is not at liberty to discuss the identity of any of the applicants other than the preferred candidate, he stressed.

Mayor Narkewicz fielded additional specific questions about the appointment process and the role of the Council on Aging (COA) board. The COA board is basically advisory to the Senior Services Department rather than to the Mayor's office, he clarified.

Councilor LaBarge asked why the COA board would come before the City Council in open public session and express concern about the Mayor not hearing their voices.

As a multi-member body, the COA board is a public body under Massachusetts law and can only speak or take action as a group in the context of a duly-called public meeting, Mayor Narkewicz responded. Individual board members can speak as private citizens but, unless and until a board

takes a vote on an agenda item at a posted public meeting, it can't be said that the board as a whole has spoken or recommended a particular action, he explained.

After receiving the recommendations of the screening committee, he held one-on-one interviews with the candidates and thought about who would be best to serve as the next director, Mayor Narkewicz elaborated. He did 'significant due diligence' in conducting reference checks of the finalist, he assured.

Committee members agreed by consent to recognize a member of the public.

A woman who did not identify herself asked if her understanding is correct that the members of the screening committee were hand-selected by the Mayor.

Councilor Carney confirmed that the Mayor had sole discretion over members of the screening committee.

COA Board Member Marlene Marrocco stressed that the representatives of the COA board who served on the screening committee did not poll other members of the board as to their preference for director. When five members resigned at last Thursday's meeting, it was because the board did take a vote at that time and unanimously endorsed Heather. The two COA members on the screening committee did not represent the board itself, she emphasized.

Mayor Narkewicz confirmed that he viewed screening committee members as individuals and not necessarily as representing the views of their respective boards.

Councilor LaBarge expressed her understanding that three of the inmates who volunteer at the Bistro are Servsafe-certified. She asked if this would allow the Bistro to reopen even if the director herself is not certified. According to the Board of Health, the requirement is just for one Servsafe-certified individual to be present during Bistro operations, Mayor Narkewicz related. Other senior center directors have worked to obtain certification during their employment, he pointed out.

There being no further questions about the process, Mayor Narkewicz introduced Marie Westburg and briefly summarized her professional experience and qualifications.

In addition to her professional experience, Ms. Westburg cited her life experience of caring for her mother-in-law with dementia in her own home for two and a half years as giving her first-hand knowledge of the needs of caregivers and preparing her for the responsibility of overseeing senior services. Also, her experience working as the director in a small town with limited resources has provided her with valuable perspective in addressing challenges common to many communities in different ways. She is very excited to transfer her skills to a larger community with more seniors to participate in programs. They are living in a unique time when it is necessary to prepare for a major shift in culture with the rise in the senior population, she observed. Her focus will be to see what the needs and interests are in Northampton rather than to force her views on people, she shared. Listening to residents is the best way to achieve the goal of becoming an age-friendly community, she suggested.

She is looking forward to showing people why the Mayor chose her and is hoping no one will be disappointed, she concluded. She has worked with Heather Cahillane and really understands why people like her so much, she added. She is sorry she is leaving because she would really have liked having her as her Assistant Director.

Ms. Westburg fielded questions and comments from individual committee members. Among other things, members asked about her plans to include children and other age groups in Senior Center programming.

She was misquoted in the Gazette and has no plans to change the senior center into a community center, Ms. Westburg assured.

Councilor Nash thanked her for her kind words about outgoing Assistant Senior Center Director Heather Cahillane, describing the affection for her among seniors as “fierce and palpable” and reflective of the hard work she has put into her position.

“I’ve done a lot of things with very little money [in Williamsburg], so . . . with more staff and very capable staff, I should not have any problems meeting the needs of the community and the senior center,” Ms. Westburg stated.

There being no further questions, **Councilor Bidwell moved to forward the appointment of Marie Westburg as Senior Services Director to the full council with a positive recommendation. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.**

The Committee took a five-minute recess.

B. 18.082 Appointments to the Arts Council and Housing Authority - referred by City Council, 04/05/2018

Arts Council

John Thorpe, 97 South St., Northampton, MA 01060

Term: April 2018 - June 2021

(To replace the expired term of Herbert Ross)

Eamonn Edge, 56 Summer St., Northampton, MA 01060

Term: April 2018 - June 2019

(To replace the term of Joe Pesce)

Dara Herman Zierlan, 49 Lyman Road, Northampton, MA

Term: April 2018 - June 2021

(To replace the expired term of Eric Olsson)

Northampton Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

Fenessa Hayde, 17B Hampshire Heights, Northampton, MA

Term: April 2018 - June 2023

(To replace the expired term of Ronald Hebert)

Councilor LaBarge has indicated an interest in interviewing Fenessa Hayde, Councilor Carney said. She expressed willingness to accept volunteers to interview the three candidates for the Arts Council. Councilor Bidwell offered to speak to Dara Herman Zierlan, Councilor Nash offered to speak to Eamonn Edge and Maureen agreed to call John Thorpe.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilor Bidwell moved to approve the minutes of March 5, 2018. Councilor Nash seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

6. New Business

Members agreed to have an expanded discussion of the appointment process for boards and commissions at the next meeting.

7. Adjourn.

Upon motion made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m.

Prepared By:

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